

# critical digest

Vol. III No. 4

September 25, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

## N.Y. Openings This Week

Affairs of State-Royale, 9/25/50. Celeste Holm and Reginald Owen star in new comedy by Louis Verneuil. Produced by Krakeur & Finklehoffe, directed by the author.  
...Southern Exposure-Biltmore, 9/26/50. Owen Crump's comedy with Cameron Mitchell and Betty Greene Little. Directed by Margo Jones, produced by Jones, Adoue & Gurian  
...Black Chiffon-48th Street Theatre, 9/27/50. Lesley Storm's play with all-British cast starring Flora Robson. Presented by John Wildberg, directed by Charles Hickman.  
...Season in the Sun-Cort, 9/28/50. Comedy by critic Wolcott Gibbs features Richard Whorf, Nancy Kelly, Anthony Ross and Paula Laurence. Directed by Burgess Meredith, produced by Burr & Pearson.

## Daily Critics Rate the New British Play

Daphne Laureola-Music Box, 9/18/50. Nine "pros", four "cons" and one "so-so" were filed by the daily reviewers. Dame Edith Evans was hailed by all. Question was if James Bridie's script was strong enough for an evening's entertainment. Play which was billed as "comedy" was called "tragedy" by reviewers. Critics of Times, Mirror, Post and World Telegram & Sun condemned the script. Sheaffer, Eagle, and Field, Newark News, praised it as literate, eloquent and multi-dimensional in scope. Remsinder considered talents of Evans and co-star Cedric Parker more than enough to outweigh a weak play. Many nominated Evans' drunk scene to theatre's Hall of Fame. Though several thought the character was similar to Candida. Barnes, Herald Tribune, was undecided in his opinion. Chapman, News, noted audience was cheering at final curtain, though he wasn't so moved. Hobe, Variety, enjoyed performances and play, but doubted if it would repeat its London success. O'Connor, Journal American, liked show, but thought it was more of a House of Commons debate than a play.

## New Willy Loman in Miller Play

Critics returned to Death of a Salesman to rate performance by Thomas Mitchell. Actor who played role on road and on Decca records won four critics to his side. Chapman, News, Coleman, Mirror, Watts, Post, and Colby, Journal of Commerce, thought his performance ranked with the best. But Atkinson, Times, felt Mitchell added too much lightness and comedy to the role. He urged director Elis Kazan to brush up the almost new cast; as it stands now it is a shallow play. Coleman and Chapman were of different opinion; they felt play had kept up to high peak. Colby and Coleman urged a second visit to theatregoers who had seen it.

## Nathan's Advice to First Nighters

Personal conduct tips were issued by George Jean Nathan to the first nighters who win seats around him. The guy in back shouldn't stick legs into the critic's elbow, nearby reviewers should dim their pocket flashlights, strangers should remain strangers, and every one should cooperate to let him make up his own mind about the play. And please don't mistake him for either Wolcott Gibbs or Brooks Atkinson.

## News & Notes

Avon Press to compile book of Journal American columns by Louis Sobol...Ashton Stevens celebrates 50th anniversary with Chicago Herald Tribune...Greenberg to publish Dan Blum's "A Pictorial History of American Theatre, 1900-1950"...Ticket brokers agreement with League of NY Theatres extended...Show of Month Club opening branches in Boston and Philadelphia...Senator Glen Taylor to tour in Desert Song next summer.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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Shows are rated s to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times                | 11. Newark News         | 21. Catholic World  |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune       | 12. Women's Wear Daily  | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News                 | 13. Daily Worker        | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror               | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star)   | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post                 | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse)      | 17. Morning Telegraph   | 27. Time            |
| 8. NY Journal American     | 18. Variety             | 28. Nation          |
| 9. NY World-Telegram & Sun | 19. Billboard           | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle         | 20. Theatre Arts        | 30. New Yorker      |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-9-13-14-22-25-29.  
So-So: 16-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 23. So-So: 6-29.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfield, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.  
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.  
None: 13.

Kiss Me, Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16.  
So-So: 2-22-30.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-10-11-15-17-19-23. Con: 1-2-12-16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18. None: 7-9-13-21-22-24-25.

Peter Pan-St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.  
None: 28.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.  
None: 5-10-11-13-14-16-22-28-29.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26.  
None: 7-18-25-28.

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' Green Room Department '  
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**CRITIC'S REVENGE...**Donald Kirkley, drama critic of Baltimore Sun whose 1944 Broadway play Happily Ever After was panned by NY critics, had chance to answer back. Play revived at Lutherville, Md. Hilltop Theatre received enthusiastic reception. Critic in curtain speeches quoted disparaging NY reviews and blamed Gene Lockhart for "ruining" NY production with faulty conception of main character. Later Kirkley subbed in minor role.

**COLUMN TIPS...**Winchell is positive Zanuck's "All About Eve" picture is about George Jean Nathan...Walker wants ANTA to revive Come of Age with Judith Anderson... Broadway hit show has made quiet settlement with writer who suggested idea and title, but didn't get credit, whispers Kilgallen...Hi Phillips denies he did any of the sketches for Peep Show, no matter what the program might say.

**INDUSTRY MOBILIZATION...**Billboard editorial suggests "American Entertainment Industry Committee to Aid in War Against Communism". Group would cooperate with government, military and private organizations. Trade paper condemned idea of Industry Loyalty Board as unworkable.

**DELAYED "PEEP" PRO...**Morehouse, WT&S, files his vote in favor of Mike Todd's Peep Show. While he thought the production fairly shrieked to have Bobby Clark loping on stage, he enjoyed the Piero Brothers, Peanuts Mann, Lina Roday, several songs and assorted chorus girls.

**MUSICAL CHAIRS...**Theatre Guild's opening nights are headaches to those who dole out the tickets, reveals Wahls, News. Usual first nighters plus friends of producer plus subscribers must be taken care of. Madison Square Garden was suggested as suitable site for opening of Christopher Fry's The Lady's Not for Burning.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS...**Press Agent's Report drew two additional comments. Theatre News Weekly editorial urged dash of vision and faith as necessary ingredients. Chapman, News, reminded that important job is to persuade country that touring companies are of the highest quality. Pointing finger at Jean Arthur, he stated that nobody is indispensable to a good play or musical...Sheaffer, Eagle, condemned weird plan to film GBS' goodbye to world. Only way to know author's genius and intellect is to read them.

**"MADAM" PUNS...**Call Me Madam joins the pun parade weeks before its opening. Winchell suggests "Call Me Merman". Hi Phillips adds "Call Me Mesta" and "Crouse Pacific".

**REVIVAL SUGGESTIONS...**Watts, Post, continues listing plays he would like to see revived. Critics were asked by now defunct Festival Theatre what plays they would like, but none answered publicly at the time. Watts' current ideas include O'Casey's Shadow of a Gunman, Ibsen's Vikings of Helgoland. Shaw's In Good King Charles Golden Days and Saroyan's Love's Old Sweet Song.

**GETTING SOFT...**The old fire has left Theatre Alley complains Sobol, Journal American. No longer do producers remove ads because of sour notices, or do critics get horsewhipped for nasty reviews. On second thought the columnist thinks the latter may have been in a movie.

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' Random Items '  
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Ethel Water's autobiography to be published Oct 31...Boston University setting up George Gershwin workshop...Spanish Dramatic Company opens season at Master Institute Theatre...Margaret Webster Shakespeare Company temporarily suspended...Ruth Hussey receives honorary degree from Pembroke College...Rodgers & Hammerstein will receive gold medal of One Hundred Year Association...NBC Mary Margaret McBride to switch to ABC Network.



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' Henry Morgan vs. Critics '  
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NY critics were invited to soak their heads in sulphuric acid by WNBC Henry Morgan in his second annual blast at the drama reviewers. Morgan disagreed violently with the critics opinion on Daphne Laureola. While some critics panned play for not having a message, he said, they also pen plays when they do have messages. Doctors consider such individuals "looney". It is a sad state of affairs when theatre industry is judged by group of frustrated playwrights. The fact was, Morgan continued, that the audience laughed its head off, but not one "looney" mentioned it. He concluded by inviting all of the critics to his house for a big party on Saturday night. They were urged to bring little presents like money. Morgan is willing to bet 100 million dollars that the critics will praise Call Me Madam which will not have a message.

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' Interview Roundup '  
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JOANNE WOODLUCK...Young actress who landed part in Eddie Dowling's A Springboard to Nowhere, and who is now acting as his secretary, detailed her plans for revenge on agents who shunned her to Bolton, Morning Telegraph. These former enemies are now required to wait and wait and wait before they get to talk to her boss.

PETER LAWRENCE...Co-producer of Peter Pan is now an associate TV director of Starlight Theatre, Hawkins, WT&S, discovered. In the course of presenting the Barrie classic with two top stars he had to make so many deals the best he ever will do is make six per cent of the profits. Thus he is now working on a regular job for \$73.50 per week.

NOEL COWARD...British playwright stopped off on his way from London to Jamaica to speak at Drama Desk luncheon. He has no plans to bring his Ace of Clubs musical to U.S., and he is not working on another play at present. Instead he will work on a sequel to his "Present Indicative" biography. Chapmen, News, would like to see some of the short stories he plans to write.

CATHLEEN NESBITT...Current "Julia" in The Cocktail Party admitted to Morehouse, WT&S, that she doesn't understand her part or the play, but she loves playing in it. She recalled playing with John Barrymore in Justice. She noted that NY audiences take theatre more seriously than do the London playgoers.

PAUL COOGAN...Advertising writer who specializes in attending "Last Nights" told his reasons to WCBS Bill Leonard. Practice started when he was attending college and only had enough money for second balcony seat. Now he discovers that cast gives best performance on closing nights after long successful run. If show is quick flop the cast ad libs new script as they go.

MELVILLE COOPER...Busy actor's next Broadway appearance is in Frederick Lonsdale comedy Tomorrow is Yesterday, he told MBS Sardis. As he approaches "old age" he likes to keep the script with him in rehearsal as long as possible. He discovers that in Shaw plays especially it is most important to learn the part word for word.

ILKA CHASE...Now in Chicago for appearance in Goodbye My Fancy at the Chevy Chase Theatre, the actress-author told MBS Bob Elson that she has solved her lecture title problem the easy way. Calling her talk "Speaking for Myself" she is able to discuss anything she wants at any time.

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' Chit-Chat '  
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Drama Critics Circle holds first meeting of year Sept 27...Hy Gardner's "Early Bird" column to appear in all editions of Herald Tribune...Vernon Rice, Post, back from first Hollywood trip...J.J.Shubert injured in fall to pavement.

